



News Release

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UDOH Launches Online Story Bank

SALT LAKE CITY – Jenny learned to watch for warning signs during her pregnancy by studying her family health history. Jane launched a personal healthy living campaign when she realized she couldn't "wish" herself healthy. Like Jane and Jenny, thousands more Utahns have health stories that highlight their hopes, strengths, and struggles. Now, there is a place online where all those stories can be shared: <http://health.utah.gov/bhp/sb/>.

The Utah Health Story Bank project is led by the Utah Department of Health (UDOH) Bureau of Health Promotion (BHP). BHP programs are responsible for health education campaigns focusing on prevention and control of chronic diseases like diabetes, heart disease and obesity. Health professionals know that shared experiences can be valuable tools in convincing people to make changes in their personal health behavior.

"We're very happy to be launching this innovative tool," says Heather Borski, BHP director. "It gives Utahns an opportunity to share their health stories, and their stories will help us demonstrate to others the important, tangible and personal impacts of our programs."

Those who'd like to share stories can go to the UDOH Web site (<http://health.utah.gov>) and click on the 'Utah Health Story Bank' icon. Once at the story bank, they can register and then submit their story. All stories will be kept confidential and will only be shared with the public, legislators, or other health professionals with express permission from the person submitting the story.

Storytelling is a time-tested teaching practice used to share messages and make them memorable. The method has been found effective in a variety of informal and formal settings.

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"Few things motivate people to change their lives for the better than success stories from real people, folks they can relate to as fellow human beings," says Dr. David Sundwall, UDOH executive director. "Statistics and scare tactics often don't have the intended impact, but stories from others' lives can make a big difference."

Jenny Johnson of the BHP Genomics program was motivated to start the story bank by her own experience. "We had collected a few stories in the past and used them to teach other Utahns about the importance of knowing their family health histories," said Johnson. "We could have taught people the same thing with lectures and data, but it's only when we put a face on the issue that we find we touch others' lives. We're excited to have this resource and hope Utahns will feel pride in sharing their experiences."

There is no limit on the number of stories a person may submit to the story bank, and one does not have to suffer from heart disease, asthma or another chronic disease to share a health story. One may share his or her experiences with traumatic injury or domestic abuse, as well. All stories will be screened for appropriate language and content.

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The mission of the Utah Department of Health is to protect the public's health through preventing avoidable illness, injury, disability and premature death; assuring access to affordable, quality health care; and promoting healthy lifestyles.